

[McHenry: GOP will draw districts with race in mind](#) (Raleigh News & Record – May 5, 2011)

By Michael Biesecker

State Republican leaders scrambled Wednesday to distance themselves from comments made by U.S. Rep. Patrick McHenry, who suggested that his party would use race as a determining factor in redrawing North Carolina's congressional districts to give GOP candidates maximum advantage. McHenry, who is from Cherryville, has emerged as a point man for the Republican effort to redraw the lines of the state's 13 congressional districts now that the GOP has won control of the state legislature. In an interview with the POLITICO new site, McHenry said Republicans would unseat incumbent Democrats by concentrating black voters into a new minority-majority district. "It's politically probable that there will be a new minority influence district," McHenry said, according to a POLITICO story posted online Wednesday.

"Republicans should pick up three seats under any fair and legal map," he continued. "That is huge. No other states in the nation would gain as many Republican seats. Clearly, Reps. (Larry) Kissell and (Brad) Miller are serving their final term." McHenry declined a request from The News & Observer on Wednesday to expand on or clarify his remarks. His office said the congressman would have no further comment on the issue. Democrats have worried for months that Republicans drawing the new district lines for the 2012 election could concentrate black and Latino voters into a third minority-majority district. State Sen. Dan Blue, a Democrat from Raleigh, has said that would amount to "ghettoizing" black voters to reduce their influence. McHenry's remarks appear to be the first public confirmation that such a plan is in the works.

The comments also come as legislators hold a series of public hearings across the state where residents have the opportunity to offer opinions about how the district lines are drawn. State Sen. Bob Rucho, the Republican who leads the Senate redistricting committee, quickly distanced himself from McHenry's comments. "If he's drawing maps, we'd like to see them," said Rucho, a dentist from Matthews. "He doesn't speak for me. He doesn't speak for Rep. (David) Lewis." Lewis, a Republican from Dunn, is the House redistricting committee chairman. Rucho said his committee was still gathering public comment and that whatever plan the panel ends up with would have to comply with provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act, the 1965 law designed to ensure the rights of minorities. The legality of the Republican-drawn districts also will have to be approved by the U.S. Justice Department, which is controlled by the Obama administration.

Tables are turned

Republicans drawing lines for the first time since Reconstruction will work from a 2010 Census that left current congressional and legislative districts unbalanced a decade after they were last drawn. By law, Democratic Gov. Bev Perdue cannot veto redistricting legislation. Rebalancing the district's populations means that some, such as the 1st District of Democrat G.K. Butterfield in the northeast, must be redrawn to take in more people. Others, such as the Charlotte area's 9th District, represented by Republican Sue Myrick, will have to shrink. In past decades, Republicans accused Democrats of gerrymandering in drawing the state's two existing "majority-minority" congressional districts, which are represented by Butterfield and Rep. **Mel**

Watt

of Charlotte, both African-Americans. The 1992 creation of

Watt's

12th district led to Supreme Court challenges and a redrawing of his district.

Vulnerable districts

One place GOP lawmakers might attempt to create a third majority-minority district is along the southern part of the state, through much of what is now Kissell's 8th District. Such a plan could effectively siphon traditionally Democratic voters from Kissell and Rep. Mike McIntyre, who represents the 7th District. The GOP could also add black voters to Butterfield's district from that of freshman GOP Rep. Renee Ellmers, in an effort to make the 2nd district seat she won in November more secure. U.S. Rep. David Price, the most senior member of the state's Democratic delegation, sits in one of the acknowledged safe districts, representing Durham and Orange counties, along with parts of Wake and Chatham. "I was surprised by the blatantly partisan nature of some of the comments," Price said of McHenry. "And I hope that's not indicative of the approach that's being taken." Redistricting is inevitably partisan, Price said, but he added that the process should accommodate fairness and consider the nature of North Carolina's various communities. Jane Pinsky, director of the N.C. Coalition for Lobbying and Government Reform, said Wednesday that Republicans appear to be engaging in the same behavior they long complained about when Democrats ran the legislature. "It's a sign of the worst partisanship possible that, before public hearings are over, Rep. McHenry is carving up districts for partisan advantage," Pinsky said. "Clearly, that does not meet the definition of a fair and open process." Rucho denied that a GOP redistricting plan was already being developed in secret. "We don't have a strategy at this point," Rucho said.